

## Democracy versus history

Tourain, Alain; Valenzuela, Samuel

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Forschungsbericht / research report

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Tourain, A., & Valenzuela, S. (1996). *Democracy versus history*. (Reihe Politikwissenschaft / Institut für Höhere Studien, Abt. Politikwissenschaft, 34). Wien: Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS), Wien. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-266822>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

**Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS), Wien  
Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna**

**Reihe Politikwissenschaft / Political Science Series**

**No. 34**

**Democracy versus History**

**Alain Touraine**

With a Commentary by J. Samuel Valenzuela



# Democracy versus History

**Alain Touraine**

With a Commentary by J. Samuel Valenzuela

Reihe Politikwissenschaft / Political Science Series No. 34

**May 1996**

Prof. Alain Touraine  
École des hautes études en sciences sociales  
54, Boulevard Raspail, F-75006 Paris  
Phone: 0033/1/4954-2457

Prof. J. Samuel Valenzuela  
103 Banbury Road, Flat 5  
Oxford OX2 6JX  
United Kingdom

University of Notre Dame  
The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies  
203 Hesburgh Center for International Studies  
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-5677  
USA  
Fax: 001/219/631-6717

**Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS), Wien**  
**Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna**

Die **Reihe Politikwissenschaft** wird von der Abteilung Politologie des Instituts für Höhere Studien (IHS) in Wien herausgegeben. Ziel dieser Publikationsreihe ist, abteilungsinterne Arbeitspapiere einer breiteren fachinternen Öffentlichkeit und Diskussion zugänglich zu machen. Die inhaltliche Verantwortung für die veröffentlichten Beiträge liegt bei den AutorInnen. Gastbeiträge werden als solche gekennzeichnet.

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

## **Abstract**

Democratic thought has shifted its focus from history to memory. Liberty is now claimed in the name of a particular past – not in the name of an indefinite future, common to us all, a final point of convergence. The political thought of the Enlightenment and of the revolutionary epoch bore the democratic spirit by acting as a force destroying private powers, social barriers and cultural intolerance; but it is now becoming increasingly antidemocratic, elitist and even repressive, whenever it identifies a nation, social class, age group or gender with reason, so as to justify its domination over other categories. Today, democracy's principal enemies are no longer tradition and belief but, on the one hand, fundamentalist community-based ideologies (whether their contents be nationalistic, ethnic or theocratic), which use modernity as a means of domination, and on the other hand, the blind trust in an open market, where cultural identities are mixed. Under these conditions, democratic thought must cease being prophetic. Democracy can no longer turn toward a promising future but toward a space to be reconstructed, to make room for the free construction of personal life and for the social and political forms of mediation that can protect it.

## **Keywords**

Democracy, Equality, Culture, History, Future.

**Notes**

Professor Alain Touraine presented “Democracy versus History” on 30 November 1995 as the Inaugural Lecture of the IAS conference *Second Vienna Dialogue on Democracy* on “Democracy and Time.”

## **Contents**

- 1. Revolutionary Democracy 1**
- 2. Liberal Democracy 5**
- 3. Social and Cultural Democracy 8**
- 4. Unity and Difference 13**

### **Formal-Political and Societal Democracy**

A Commentary on Alain Touraine's  
"Democracy versus History" **17**



The ideas of society and democracy are contradictory. By society, we mean a hierarchized, differentiated, self-regulated system. Less theoretically, we describe our complex contemporary societies as being involved in international competition, faced with crises from without and within, and largely dominated by financial, industrial and labor union centers of decisions, by the mass media and powerful political parties, and by a wide variety of special interests, professional and trade associations and lobbies – all that without forgetting these societies' cultural heritage. As a consequence, the way, whether democratic or authoritarian, of managing these societies, is not itself a form of social organization. "Political facts" are not a special category of "social facts". They are a different category of facts. Politics is a means for intervening in the way society is organized. Forms of power are not to be confused with forms of authority, and do not even correspond to them. Rational-legal authority, such as the "Etat de droit" (*Rechtsstaat*, what we might call the law-abiding State), is not in and of itself democratic. As a matter of fact, the triumph of rational, legal authority in the West was connected with the constitution of absolute monarchies – well before democratic government.

From the start of our analysis, we must reject the conceptions, or rather ideologies, that claim a government is democratic if it effectively responds to the population's needs – if, for example, it improves education or health, or speaks out loud and clear in the name of a national consciousness. The exteriority of political actions may take on quite diverse forms, ranging from respect for formal procedures to religious or secular conceptions of human rights, but this exteriority is so essential for defining democracy that we can eliminate as nondemocratic – and this does not mean always a negative judgment – the appeal to the interests of a people, a nation or a majority group. As important as free elections are for defining democracy is the legal recourse against decisions made by power-holders. These brief remarks call for comments and I shall dwell on some of them at length hereafter. My intention in placing them in my introduction is to orient, from the outset, our analysis toward the nonsocial grounds of democracy.

## 1. Revolutionary Democracy

This separation between democracy and economic or social organization may come as a surprise to some of us, since we are so used to the tight linkage which exists in our societies between government and economic interests. But this idea seemed almost self-evident to the philosophers, from Hobbes to Rousseau, who invented the idea of people's sovereignty. During the revolutionary era, it meant that a "civil society" under the sway of privileges, interests and traditions, which created inequalities, was transformed and dominated by a political society, which was founded on the equality of all before the law. Of course, civil rights, though general in theory, were constantly limited for social reasons, even though ideologists claimed to base the legal incapacitation of certain persons (the insane, the illiterate and the economically dependent) on their inability to act as free persons endowed with Reason; but the appeal to

natural law, itself clearly separated from positive law and thus from social reality, demonstrated that the advance of democracy implied, given its radical principles, destroying existing society. The countries whose history has borne the democratic ideal, all achieved political freedom through revolutions: Holland and the United Provinces, as early as of the late 16th Century, Great Britain in 1688, the United States upon independence, and France, which, in June 1789, proclaimed the principle of popular sovereignty and the legitimacy of the National Assembly, which had formed out of the *Etats Generaux*. Tocqueville clearly pointed out the principle which led to the destruction of the Ancient Regime equality, which was a matter not of conditions but of rights, and forcibly did away with barriers, statuses, ranks, *Stände*.

I must add that this appeal to *de jure* equality and against *de facto* inequality would not have gained historical momentum, had it not been grounded in a keen consciousness of history's natural evolution. The more a society is modern, the more it undergoes rapid change and acts upon itself; and the more it removes social barriers inherited from the past. The more it appeals to reason, the less it can bear the weight of tradition. Whereas traditional political cultures, in particular religious ones, associated nature with society and readily depicted the monarch's, wise man's or father's natural authority, modern political culture associates the legal principle of equality with historical laws which impose the destruction of privileges as a condition of economic modernization. The combination of historical predictions and moral judgments has impelled the idea of progress. This idea is based on the discovery of historical laws and on the belief that reason is present in all individuals, that – in Descartes' now commonplace words – common sense is the widest shared thing in the world. The more the principle of intervention in society comes from outside, is universalistic, the more it is in conflict with real power; and the more it legitimizes itself on the belief in a historical necessity that is more absolute than the monarch's power. Only the alliance between developing productive forces and human freedom can win out over the alliance between power and mechanisms of social control (such as law, education or propaganda).

From its birth in modern history, democracy was grounded in hope. For two centuries or more, the ideas of democracy could not be separated from that of a revolution (or radical reforms) that would do away with the obstructions barring entry into a modern society that, rationally organized, would be both protective of the rational interests of everyone and socially just, since it was based on a principle of absolute equality.

The idea of revolution was and is even stronger when it directly serves social categories that were or are defined in terms of dependency, exploitation or alienation instead of their social function, their labor or their skill. These "dominated masses", although they can rise up against their rulers, cannot create a free society. Such a society must be conceived and realized by revolutionary intellectuals in the service of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat or colonized nations. Thanks to them, the laws of historical evolution can work. This led revolutionary movements to be transformed, once they took power, into authoritarian governments. Despite this, we cannot

refuse to consider these movements to be democratic or, at least, to have democratic components.

Today, I would like to talk about hopeless democracy, because our political culture no longer associated democracy with the hope that historical necessity would ultimately win out over the material, political and ideological obstructions maintained by the privileged. This old political culture defined democracy like Lincoln did in his Gettysburg Address: The government of the people, for the people, by the people. The word “people” refers here both to the will of a majority (or even a general will, in Rousseau’s language) and to an almost material reality, to the reality of productive forces, of all the members of a society, whether they be workers or citizens.

Revolutionary democracy considers itself to be the most open and powerful form of government, since it alone can mobilize all energies in society. The people’s victory is the victory of labor and of the future over the privileged, over profit-making and the past. This notion opposes a homogeneous community (the people), which is the concrete expression of equality, to a hierarchical, differentiated society. Grounded as it is in a confident belief in historical evolution, this conception of democracy leads to a voluntaristic politics that destroys social barriers and founds a community of citizens – an all-powerful political society that keeps civil society (where inequality reappears) under its sway. While society is defined as a heritage, a tradition or a system of social reproduction, politics becomes the domain of the One – of unanimity or at least of the large majority. Separated from social actors, this revolutionary democracy cannot recognize freedom of speech, nor the possibility for the majority to become a minority. This democratic politics acts through symbolic demonstration of popular unity and purges of minorities. Public debate merely serves to reveal the egoism of even treason of those who, unworthy of citizenship, must be expelled or destroyed.

This conception of democracy – which we hesitate to qualify as popular since this expression has become so repulsive – often results in a clear-cut separation between what it calls the democratic movement and the political game, and it defines the parliament’s role as a permanent search for compromises between interests and social inequality, on the one hand, and, on the other, the principle of political equality and the unity of law. This democratic spirit is wary of institutions, of the ever threatening autonomy of political leaders, of corruption, which serves as a reminder that the forces of social domination control politics and that only the people’s will and the revolutionary spirit can make them retreat.

This revolutionary conception of democracy has not triumphed in all places and at all times; but it has prevailed in most movements that have claimed to be democratic – especially when, given external dependence or the resistance of old forms of economic organization, development and modernization could not be self-sustaining. In such situations, we find the drive toward modernization being led not by national social actors but, instead, by the State, whether of national or foreign origin, or even by foreign social actors (such as investors from

countries that are economically more powerful or better endowed with capital). Deep social cleavages thus appear and tensions mount. The idea of democracy tends to become revolutionary. It calls for a mobilizing, egalitarian force. Moreover and above all, it is based on “objective” arguments about the necessity of building a nation and generalizing the production techniques, consumption patterns or educational standards which characterize modernity. This revolutionary democratic spirit is not “culturalist” but universalist. Instead of asserting the specificity of a national, ethnic or religious tradition, it affirms the right of all to enter, even through force, into the forward-looking modern world of science, technology and power.

In what used to be called the Third World, the appeal to the people or tradition is usually a substitute for the role of enlightened monarchs or revolutionary avant-gardes in countries that were more advanced in their process of modernization. Just as, during the 19th century, the Danubian countries appealed to history and national culture in order to launch independence movements with, in many cases, strong democratic aspirations, the appeal to a cultural identity cannot, nowadays, be reduced to a mere manipulation of the people by authoritarian power-holders.

Let us look at Amerindian movements in Latin America. They have sometimes been used by non-Indian revolutionary leaders (notably in Guatemala). They have sometimes been withdrawn and defensive of their own interests (as in Nicaragua or Ecuador). Nonetheless, they have often – and especially at present – combined the defense of an ethnic identity with the quest for democratic participation in the political system. This is how we can interpret the current phase of the Zapatist movement in Chiapas, Mexico, and, especially, the transformation of Bolivian Katharism under the leadership of Victor Hugo Cárdenas, movement which has become instrumental for destroying the power of local caudillos and forming democratic political institutions at the local level. As in revolutionary worker and peasant movements, the outcome constantly risks being authoritarian, and it often is. But we cannot deny the democratizing capacities of the forementioned revolutionary movements. Obviously, the turn these movements will take depends on whether the political system opens or closes. Their history provides evidence of both the importance of democratic institutions and the absence of any insurmountable contradictions between these institutions and revolutionary movements.

It is not surprising, given the long history connecting democracy with revolution in Europe, that we have to remind ourselves of such possibilities. Obviously, this reminder has been made necessary by Communist totalitarianism, which has made democratic thought so distrustful of revolutionary words and deeds. This distrust has solid grounds, but neither more nor less solid than democrats’ mistrust of economic liberalism. I would like to maintain here an equal balance between revolutionary democracy and economic liberalism and comment on the weakness and strength of each of them before concluding that democratic thought must become independent from both of them.

During this late 20th century, characterized as it has been by authoritarian or totalitarian governments, we are turning so far away from a revolutionary conception of democracy that we often refuse to qualify a revolution as democratic. This refusal cannot be accepted for it implicitly identifies democracy with liberalism or even with self-sustaining growth. Doing this strips democracy of any autonomous effect and, as S.M. Lipset has done, turns it into a mere characteristic of successful economic modernization. Accordingly, democracy simply refers to the subsiding of conflict in a society which is wealthy and diversified enough to easily arbitrate conflicts of interests. This liberal conception, by rejecting revolutionaries' confidence in the future, leaves no other choice than to be locked into authoritarian political systems which correspond to their underdevelopment or to seek the protection and accept the influence of developed, democratic countries. I do not intend to pass moral judgment on this conception, but to point out that it fails to explain the democratic forces which are active within social and political movements which, for sure, so often end in authoritarian governments. Given that most revolutionary social movements have ended in Leninist totalitarianism and that anticolonial liberation fronts have set up personal or military dictatorships, we must, of course, inquire into the reasons underlying such a degradation. But we cannot simply refuse to recognize the democratic content of movements that appeal to the people and the nation against dominant minorities, whether national or foreign.

But, at the same time, we must conclude that the separation between the social and political orders, although it is the condition for democratic action, cannot by itself create a democratic society; on the contrary, it tends to set up an absolute power that replaces all forms of social domination by the equality of each and everyone in their submission to an absolute power. Revolutionary democracy, although it is based on democratic demands, generally tends to destroy itself.

## 2. Liberal Democracy

Revolutionary democracy has been defined here by contrasting it with liberal democracy. Whereas the former imposes a political will on a social order, the latter limits, as much as possible, the intervention of political authorities and prefers regulating the social organization through direct negotiations and the marketplace. Liberalism is content with having political authorities enforce duly signed contracts, ensure honesty in transactions, and guarantee the reliability of the information to be made available to social or economic actors so that they can make rational choices. Just as the revolutionary conception subordinates the social to the political sphere, the liberal conception subordinates it to the economy, provided that it defines economic behavior as broadly as possible in the same way as it defined the notions of interest or utility, incorporating in them social and cultural elements.

In sociology, the notion of strategic action best represents this liberal conception – better than rational choice theories, which are too indifferent to the real social conditions wherein decisions are made. Since H. Simon, J. March, M. Crozier and many others, the sociology of organizations and of decision-making has shown how, in an environment which is little controlled or even known, the quest to optimize advantages and lower costs leads to a network of shifting, complex interactions. Very often, these strategies are defensive rather than offensive. They aim at controlling uncertainty rather than obtaining immediately measurable advantages. Likewise, in elections, we vote for candidates who defend our interests just as often as for candidates who seem to be supported by people like ourselves, who have historical or ideological references similar to our own, and, in particular, who oppose those whom we reject as a major threat. We act that way because it is often hard to directly link a personal interest to a macro-economic policy, a penal code reform or changes in the educational system.

At his point, we are talking about “freedom from” – about “negative freedom”. And we readily adopt this concept since, at least in central or developed countries, we fear above all else a dictatorial, authoritarian power which would mobilize economic, political and cultural resources, for enhancing its own domination.

Whereas revolutionaries define democracy as a victorious political will, liberals think of it as the freedom of social and – especially but not only – political actors.

This conception of strategic action leads actors, in their quest for optimization, to pragmatically take into account the interests and intentions of other actors and, therefore, to negotiate with them. The most efficient organizations are not the most rationalized ones but, on the contrary, those that, aware of the demands and opportunities emerging out of the economic, technical or political environment, are capable of continually reworking relations of influence. The most effective organizations are those that struggle against vested interests and *Nomenklatura*. We can understand why many political authorities and sociologists tend to describe as democratic the flexible networks of influence that make step by step necessary adaptations. They thus ultimately identify democracy with the management of complexity and uncertainty.

This conception seems to stand directly opposite from what I have called revolutionary democracy. However, these two concepts are not entirely opposed to each other. Both are grounded in a historical hope or aspiration. Both believe in the end of history through the victory either of science and technology or of voluntaristic actions. In other words, revolutionaries and liberals both subordinate the social order to an order lying outside society – to the order of Reason. Present-day liberals believe in a historical trend toward increasing complexity and uncertainty, as change becomes an ongoing process and changes are less and less coordinated. As a result, it will be ever more difficult to define a highly modern society by its type of social organization or its mode of production. According to the liberal philosophy of

history, systems tend to break down; and planning yields to permanent regulation through market mechanisms and negotiated solutions or limited conflict. Here, too, the idea crops up that the established social order, itself deemed to be arbitrary or subject to private interests, will break down. Liberals, as well as revolutionaries, introduce a nonsocial, nearly natural (or in any case, one far from ideology and the popular will) principle which is more powerful than social domination itself. Revolutionaries and liberals are both wary of anything having to do with institutions, legal constructions and, more broadly, actors. The difference between them is that liberals believe in practical interactions, whereas revolutionaries believe in freeing productive forces so as to upset a social order criticized for being unjust and archaic. But they have in common that they both believe in the ultimate triumph of a rational order over inequality, privileges and arbitrary forms of power and authority which are more or less rapidly eroded. At this point, Tocqueville's heirs are not different from the Jacobins'. In both cases, we glimpse the same hope for an accountable society subject to universal principles.

The relationship between these two families of thought becomes even clearer when we contrast them with nationalist movements that subordinate the organization of social activities to the defense of an identity, of a cultural or historical tradition. These *völkisch* conceptions and the concepts shaped and shared by liberals and revolutionaries are more deeply at odds than are liberal and revolutionary ideas of democracy. In particular, the opposition between, on the one hand, liberal or revolutionary "developmentalism" and, on the other, religious, ethnic or cultural nationalisms is so clear that the history of many a revolutionary movement can (as Farhad Khosrokhavar has done for the Iranian case) be analyzed as a sudden shift from the one to the other – as post-revolutionary power-holders eliminate the social revolutionary movement (as happened so fast under victorious Leninism). This shift from a social movement to an antidemocratic government has happened too frequently for us not to see, in the former, a democratic tendency that the latter will destroy.

Democracy and cultural nationalism are incompatible whereas liberalism and revolution are not fully at odds since they share the democratic spirit's central principle, which, I repeat, is the subordination of the social organization to a nonsocial principle. The fact that liberalism is as laden with hope as the revolutionary spirit has almost become evident in the past few years, following the fall of the Soviet empire and ideology. The end of the Cold War has brought about the triumph of the idea of globalization, hence, of something beyond empires and States – and some persons would even say, somewhat naively, beyond war, – something working toward a world unified through its markets, mass communications and the growing awareness of threats against life on earth. The slogan "Proletarians of all lands, unite!" has now become as "Consumers of all lands, unite!" The contents and consequences of rationalist utopias are changing; but these utopias have all kept the idea that history has an end and a meaning – that, if the fall into barbarity is to be avoided, the social order will have to be subordinated to a nonsocial principle for regulating social exchanges.

The liberal conception bears, from within, the same fundamentally democratic principle as the revolutionary one, but it deserves to be criticized as severely as the latter. In both cases, a global, nonsocial vision imposes its logic on a social order defined in purely negative terms and which eliminates the idea of a social actor. Whether the rationality be that of the monarch or of the marketplace, it seeks to force itself upon a social organization characterized only by the irrationality of actors who try to protect themselves and conserve already acquired advantages, privileges and channels of influence. At this point, this parallel seems more important than the so obvious opposition between political voluntarism and liberalism's extreme mistrust of any voluntaristic, centralized intervention in social exchanges. Just as we can have doubts about a "popular" power being democratic, we can consider as alien to democracy any way of managing society that, by facilitating the accumulation of wealth and of the power to make decisions, increases social disparities instead of reducing them. A more important criticism points out that the revolutionary and liberal conceptions both eliminate political actors. But how can we maintain the idea of political actors without abandoning the principle that democracy is based on the intervention of nonsocial forces into social organization? Must we not choose between one of these two versions, revolutionary or liberal, of democratic thought (each with the limitations previously pointed out) and the idea that social actors are also political actors? This last idea seems to lead to the opposite of democracy, since a political system "representative" of social interests can only give power to the most powerful interests – it thus consolidates and reproduces social inequality, as court systems so often do. How can we combine freedom to with freedom from?

### 3. Social and Cultural Democracy

Must we then conclude that democracy and representativity lie as far apart as democracy and society? that, under all circumstances, democracy implies "conscious and organized" actors with their far-reaching interests and ideologies be eliminated by limited debates which can be easily institutionalized and dealt with by the due process of law? Democrats who admit that the revolutionary and liberal models are exhausted tend to be pulled toward this conclusion. More and more often, the democratic idea reduces to a pluralism of candidates in free elections and to the respect for the rules of the game.

This carries us back a century and a half or two centuries, when American Federalists, Tocqueville and the English Whigs were seeking to avert what they called the tyranny of the majority. To this end, they thought that the people should have the choice between several sets of leaders or programs of government but should not intervene in composing them, for this task should fall on the *sanior pars* of an electoral body, which could be quite few in number. But such a government is oligarchic rather than democratic. It has long been accused – and rightly so – of laying the institutional conditions for preserving or reinforcing the power of governing elites in politics, the economy or the media, and of thus uniting political power and money.



Besides, such a private government based on egalitarian principles can but spur the formation of a political (populist or nationalist, and usually authoritarian) countersystem. This danger crops up, at least whenever social barriers are not high enough to keep the people out of the playing field reserved for gentlemen.

We must, it seems to me, tend toward an opposite conclusion, and dismiss both the revolutionary and the liberal conceptions of democracy for the very reason that they both do away with political actors and, instead of subordinating civil society to interventions from political society, subordinate it to some form or other of historical laws. But how can we thus defend politics and, at the same time, the principle proposed at the start, namely that democracy does not exist without the intervention of a nonsocial principle in organizing society? Do we not risk mixing politics up with the representation of social interests so much that the principle would disappear? Solving this problem entails a deep change in democratic thought.

Instead of using the recourse provided by an optimistic vision of history's evolution to face up to an unjust organization of society or the political order, democratic thought must recognize that social actors (who are involved in concrete social, occupational, and economic relations but are also bound to a nationality or gender) seek to increase their autonomy by exercising control over space and time, as well as over working and living conditions.

At his point, the now too classical contrast of Ancient and Modern freedom crops up, as set down in a brief but brilliant text written in 1819 by Benjamin Constant. As long as democracy seeks to ground itself either in the interests of the City-State or in the movement of History, freedom – the freedom of the Ancients – is associated with morals based on a sense of duty and with a politics of progress. Whenever the gods of the City-State or of History grow old and die, freedom is internalized and becomes defensive. As a consequence, the idea of democracy, which can no longer appeal to a superior principle (the City-State, Reason or History) against the State, must appeal to the personal subject, to his desire to be an actor, to be the author of his own existence, against a rationale based on History or the City-State. In fact, the latter seems to this subject to be ever more destructive of his freedom and, even more, his identity. At that point, the long alliance between democracy and history comes to an end. The democratic ideal turns against all philosophies of History.

Such a reversal did not occur in liberal thought, for example in Tocqueville's ideas. It takes place in industrial society's very heart, as the shift is made from citizens' rights or human rights to workers' rights, the latter being defined in terms of the social relations of production and decision-making. From democracy's viewpoint, this reversal has not always been successful; it has sometimes led to the antidemocratic idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But it has succeeded in the English idea of industrial democracy, as advocated by the Fabians and analyzed by the sociologist T.H. Marshall. This model of industrial relations

adapts political democracy's categories to concrete social situations. Wage-earners defend not only interests but – just as important – rights. The first right recognized to wage-earners was the right to negotiate working and employment conditions.

Workers' rights can be recognized only if wage-earners recognize employers' rights – if they admit that employers are social actors with a right to carry out projects in pursuit of their freedom to undertake actions. In a like vein, we discuss today the cultural rights of minorities and of women, who, in fact, cannot be deemed a minority. Like industrial democracy, cultural democracy assumes that its social categories are to be seen as actors who receive the recognition of their partners-opponents and who are legally recognized to have the rights and freedoms necessary to a social actor, – to be capable of modifying its environment and exercising or reinforcing its control over the conditions and forms of its activities. This conception is far from the definition of actors in terms of their social functions, the services they render, or the duties and rights that society recognizes as an attribute of their collective utility.

Both the revolutionary and liberal conceptions of democracy conceived of social actors as functional agents in society, as agents of progress or regression in history. For revolutionaries, the contradictions had to be overcome between the progress of productive forces, knowledge and reason, on the one hand, and, on the other, the social organization still either under the rule of tradition, privileges and special interests or else in pursuit of profits without any collective utility. The inevitable conflicts did not involve actors with opposite but complementary orientations and interests; but, to borrow Lukacs' terminology, these conflicts had to do with the opposition between a totality or the meaning of history and the defense of private interests. Democratic action seemed all the more necessary insofar as workers (or the nation, or any other figure representing the people) were completely dominated, exploited or alienated. In the thinking of revolutionaries, the more dependent or manipulated social actors were and the more necessary was a voluntarist or even violent democratic action. But how can we fail to see that the more such a situation exists in reality, the fewer are the chances that democracy will be realized?

The liberal vision was not, at bottom, any different. It sought to reduce collective bargaining to conflicts of interests played out in a social context that was as concrete and limited as possible. It has thus supported labor agreements worked out through collective bargaining at the company level. Political action was thus quite autonomous from organized social relations, which were not to interfere with economic actors' spontaneous behavior. On the contrary, the model of democratic politics developed by industrial democracy strongly links political and social actors – not, as revolutionary thinkers (even moderate ones) would have it by subordinating political to social action, but by letting the idea of universal rights permeate concrete social relations and by creating diversified forms of citizenship outside the political realm in the narrow sense (and outside the nation in particular).

If we define a social movement as a conflict over the social appropriation of cultural resources that all opponents accept, then democracy is necessarily related to the forming of such movements. During the industrial age, entrepreneurs and workers organized their conflicts around the issue of how to put technological progress, which both sides valued, to social use. Under these conditions, democracy solidly took root even if, in some countries (especially in Great Britain), universal suffrage was slowly introduced. Policies corresponding to industrial democracy have been pursued for long periods in Europe, and especially after WW II. They have associated progress with social conflicts through the idea of “social rights”. This association of confidence in progress with social conflict has led us away from the liberal and revolutionary philosophies of history; and it has brought the ideas of social justice and human dignity to the forefront. In particular, Welfare State policies, which were initially drawn up either in the spirit of English egalitarianism or with the Bismarckian (and then French) idea of improving workers’ living conditions, have gradually expanded. Their actions have shifted from public insurance toward solidarity – toward recognizing each individual’s rights, in the same spirit as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The new social movements have taken this trend farther, even though they have often stalled half way between industrial society and a new type of political culture. As confidence in progress has come under criticism, liberal and revolutionary solutions lose their major basis; and the idea of democracy increasingly comes to defend personal as well as collective autonomy and identity in a world dominated by the marketplace, which rules the production of symbolic goods as well as of material goods and services.

This social or cultural democracy is at odds with both liberal and revolutionary conceptions of democracy. It does appeal not to a philosophy of history but to a moral philosophy, not to a futuristic vision but to human rights. This conception serves as the grounds for a whole series of rights, which, though as universal as civil rights, have to be defended in concrete social situation – in dealings with a socially defined partner or opponent. This is the case for workers, cultural minorities and children, but also – and for the same reasons – for women who are, as well as men, endowed with human rights.

We must dwell on this disappearance of a historical, evolutionary vision, of the idea of progress. Democracy ceases being associated with a “principle of hope”. It no longer bears the utopia of a final phase of History. Although this disappearance may bewilder those still attached to either liberal or revolutionary conceptions of democracy, it can be observed in our everyday life. By recognizing this, we can avoid seeing the current crisis of old models of democratic thought and action as catastrophic.

We are – at least in industrialized countries where the governed have the freedom to choose their government at regular intervals – in a paradoxical situation: the democratic spirit, born in political society, has permeated nearly all civil society but is disappearing from political

society, or else regressing toward the forementioned model of limited democracy (a model that corresponded to the opposition of Whigs and Tories at the start of the Industrial Age in Great Britain, or of Conservatives and Liberals in several Latin American countries). Meanwhile, representative democracy's institutions are stalling, since so many persons no longer feel represented. On the contrary, we observe more and more democratic debates in new fields such as bioethics, in the plurality of family forms, labor laws, and the ways to reconcile cultural plurality with the unity of the law. This disequilibrium in favor of public opinion has resulted because politics is exhausting itself by persisting in using industrial society's political vocabulary and themes. Nowadays, politics is as distant from social reality as it was during the second half of the 19th century (especially in France), when Marx criticized the 1848 uprising and the Paris Commune for repeating the French Revolution's discourse and being blind to the social question) to the exploitation of the working class.

But we should not come back to the old distinction between real and formal democracy. Although democracy, it is true, lacks force if it does not penetrate and transform concrete social relations, social movements cannot develop themselves without political democracy. They risk being transformed into what I have called social antimovements – forces defending a group's or community's special interests, mass movements manipulated by demagogues, or military-like mobilization for destroying enemies who are seen as foreigners or traitors rather than as social opponents. This interdependence between social movements and democracy is the most important lesson we have learned during the past few decades.

Events in many areas of the world – including Europe – remind us that the working class movement, as well as the other movements arising in industrial world during the 19th century (notably, in Great Britain, the United States, Belgium and France) arose in political democracies. Griffuelhes, the general secretary of the just formed French labor confederation, the CGT, advocated for Unions an independent action from political parties in the Amiens Charter in 1906, but he said that his position was based on the fact that the political revolutions of 1789 and 1848 had already taken place. He understood that, in countries still subject to authoritarian governments, the labor movement had to join forces with democratic political parties. Even today, in post-Communist countries (in Russia and Rumania, to mention two countries we have studied), the lack of an open political system keeps social movements and actors from forming. In turn, a democracy cannot be representative if it is not based on social movements that question social relations of domination more directly than political power.

Given the interdependence between political freedom and social movements, we must replace the idea of historical progress with that of different possible types of society at a given time, of very different forms of political and social organization. We are living through the end of what has been called the great historical narratives of the politics of hope. We no longer believe, as we long did, that the future will judge. For this reason, we can say we live in a democracy without hope – and this does not mean without expectations. In fact, some observers are

inclined to assess democracy in terms of the range of choices it provides, the diversity of solutions it proposes. Whereas the philosophies of history provided us with a picture of an increasingly homogeneous humanity governed by Reason, interests or peace (and no longer by cultural traditions or beliefs), we tend to define political modernization as the loosening of norms and values – of what are considered to be the normal forms of authority or of the organization of work. We thus see political modernization as the capacity to manage diversity and uncertainty.

## 4. Unity and Difference

These remarks should not be taken for the acceptance of a cultural pluralism, a multiculturalism, that strips society of any cultural or political unity. Such a position would but accumulate the crisis of liberal thought with the crisis of revolutionary thought: liberalism would be reduced to letting the market organize exchanges, and the revolutionary idea would disintegrate into the assertion of communities that, shut upon themselves, accept no integration with other communities.

Why would we continue talking about democracy in a country that is nothing but an agglomeration of communities whose only relations with each other pass through the market? And how could we avert conflict and hinder the tendency toward segregation, racism and aggression? Even more, how could we keep those who control and use the marketplace from building a system of domination to which communities, all of them reduced to minority status, would be subjected? If we are to live together while recognizing and protecting the diversity of interests, convictions and beliefs, then each personal or collective identity must bear within an orientation toward something universal, something coherent with the general inspiration of democratic thought. The major debate nowadays has to do with this universalist orientation. Our responses to these questions have a direct bearing on the idea we have conceived of democracy.

One response can be described as optimistic, faithful to the Enlightenment's spirit. By recognizing moral or aesthetic values present in each culture, it discovers a principle of unity among these cultures beyond their different contents. However important it may be, this response is not as sound as it seems. First of all, recognizing others is not sufficient to ensure communication, debate and, thereby, agreements or compromises. Do we not risk living in our own society like a tolerant, curious visitor to a museum, who has positive feelings toward a wide range of cultures and forms of social organization but without entering into communication? Can this cultural *laissez-faire* be qualified as democratic? More importantly, cultural pluralism's apparent assumption that our societies are made up of a plurality of juxtaposed cultures and forms of social organization is not true. A society of superhighways and ghettos, of markets and communities destroys all cultures if we take culture to mean a

system for endowing practices with meanings. Such a society destroys the meaning of practices. It shuts cultural values up within a closed community, just as Islamism tries to do to Islam or as Christendom did to Christianity. Meanwhile, practices no longer mean anything apart from the ever more globalized and desocialized marketplace. For instance, we are not confronted with Islam but with oil, on one side and Islamist power, on the other.

In this universe where economy and culture, form and meaning, practices and values, are separated from each other, social – an in particular, political – mediation seems no longer possible. Dialogue between cultures is not possible, because all cultures are torn between the universe of instrumentality and the universe of identity. In this social and political vacuum, cultures with their diversity can only be reconstituted through each individual's or group's effort to rediscover his autonomy – his capacity for associating values with practices, the participation in the world of technology and the marketplace with the maintenance of a cultural identity and memory.

But we should not overestimate the distance between these optimistic and the pessimistic interpretations of diversity. It is essential to recognize what makes politics democratic, namely its role of making it possible for cultures to dialogue with each other. For some observers, freedom is the unique condition for this dialogue. For others (including myself), this dialogue supposes, first of all, that each individual consciously becomes an actor, a subject, by linking his practices with his values. This means expanding, deepening, generalizing the spirit of industrial democracy – defending, in concrete social situations, the right of each individual and group to act in compliance with his own freedom and with respect for the freedom of others.

This does not mean recognizing a culture's or civilization's universal value but, quite differently, recognizing that each individual has the right to combine participation in the marketplace and in the world of technology with a specific cultural identity. What must be recognized is not the universalist inspiration of each culture but the individualist inspiration of all those who seek to bring together what our economically globalized and culturally fragmented world increasingly tends to push apart.

This is a far cry from the philosophies of history underlying the liberal or revolutionary conceptions of democracy. We even have a hard time imagining that a people could be liberated by overthrowing the social barriers that hinder material development of the triumph of human needs. Hence, political argumentation is no longer of a historical sort, as it was during the revolutionary period and at any time when the idea of progress prevailed. Political action does not serve progress. It does not aim at attaining a certain state of society.

Let us go a little farther. The democratic spirit, like the management of diversity and the recognition of others, ever more clearly contradicts the idea of progress. Whereas this idea invited us to replace contradictory beliefs with the unity of Reason (as Voltaire scornfully

wanted to do with religions), I am advocating the return of what has been neglected, stigmatized or repressed. The social history of democratic countries over a long century can be depicted as a “recomposition of the world”, to borrow Marcel Mauss’s expression. What is personal, affective, erotic or imaginary was pushed into the inferior world of passions and traditions. It is re-emerging, not to put an end to rationalization but to ceaselessly increase the diversity and complexity of our experiences and of our models of society and culture. Women, in particular, are not demanding the substitution of affectivity for technology, but the possibility for each person to combine an occupation with so-called personal activities. We no longer accept the idea that a child is a natural being who must be disciplined in order to become a social being. We no longer believe “savages” can be defined as “primitives” – as the opposite of our modernity, a belief that enabled us to legitimate our domination over them. It is as though the Resurrection has already started, and history is being abolished.

We apply our thinking to space and no longer to time. Instead of trying to understand the meaning of history, or the march of time, we try to define possible choices for organizing social space. The democratic ideal sought to fight against social equality by asserting that we are all alike, that a day will come when we will be citizens of the world. It now affirms the opposite: that we are all different but that each of us, in his way, seeks to combine, through his experience of life, technology and the marketplace (which we have in common) with the particularity of each individual’s personal and group identity.

We are used to talking about the evolution of history as if it were a story to be told, a story with a beginning and an end. We talked as if sociology defined societies, institutions and persons by their degree of modernity – their place on a scale running from traditional to modern, from ascription to achievement, from status to contract, from holism to individualism. But these objective descriptions are becoming ever more foreign to social actors and to their understanding of their own actions and objectives. In fact, we sometimes have the impression we are turning backwards. This is G. Kepel’s idea of God’s revenge, and it holds for all those who talk about the return of nationalism or “ethnicity”. But there is no returning to the past. Instead, we observe that the linkage between modernity and a personal, cultural or community-based identity is being reworked – and that is by no means the victory of cultural or ethnic nationalism over modernity.

More concretely, the globalization of exchanges has turned what used to be successive into something simultaneous. Next to us, we see the Islamic world undergoing problems that the Christian world had (in other forms, of course) not too many centuries (or even decades) ago. This forces us to stop naively identifying ourselves with progress, modernity or universalism. It makes us inquire into our own way of combining forms of social and cultural activities, forms that are no longer separate phases in a unilinear progress. How can a purely individualistic conception of social integration and citizenship be maintained? How can we even be satisfied with only tolerating minorities – homosexuals, for example – and recognizing their rights,

without accepting that they too participate in this recomposition of our experience and without asking ourselves questions about the aspects of eroticism that they bring to light? Democracy is, above all, the whole set of institutional conditions that underlie this ongoing recomposition of the psychological and cultural experience.

Democracy can no longer speak out against tradition: it has to incorporate it, reinterpret it, by tearing apart the community-bound, holistic straitjacket wherein so many people tie up cultural traditions. Because when a community-based power enters into the fray against a modernity that it associates with the destruction of tradition, democracy perishes. It is then replaced with a new totalitarianism that mobilizes beliefs, traditions and forms of social organization for the sake of an absolute power, which thus authorizes itself to speak in the society's or culture's name.

By pursuing P. Nora's analysis, we can say that Democratic thought has shifted its focus from history to memory. Liberty is now claimed in the name of a particular past – not in the name of an indefinite future, common to us all, a final point of convergence. The political thought of the Enlightenment and of the revolutionary epoch bore the democratic spirit by acting as a force destroying private powers, social barriers and cultural intolerance; but it is now becoming increasingly antidemocratic, elitist and even repressive, whenever it identifies a nation, social class, age group or gender with reason, so as to justify its domination over other categories. Rightly so, P.A. Taguieff has denounced the prejudices underlying an antiracism that, condemning appeals to identity or tradition, becomes the ideology of the dominant, of those who see themselves as the only universalistically-oriented people because they control world markets and advanced technology.

For this same reason, democracy's principal enemies are no longer tradition and belief but, on the one hand, fundamentalist community-based ideologies (whether their contents be nationalistic, ethnic or theocratic), which use modernity as a means of domination, and on the other hand, the blind trust in an open market, where cultural identities are mixed. Democratic thought must cease being prophetic. Democracy is no longer the summit toward which persons are marching in a quest for freedom. But it cannot, either, be reduced to a fair play, which abides by the rules of the political game. Democracy is a living force for building a world as vast and diverse as possible. It is capable of combining past and future, similarities and differences. Moreover, it is capable of recreating space, of making room for political mediation, which alone can keep the world from being swept away under a flood of money and images – a situation against which those who feel they are the losers in the global marketplace are barricading themselves, shutting themselves up in an aggressive, obsessional sense of identity. Democracy no longer turns toward a promising future but toward a space to be reconstructed, to make room for the free construction of personal life and for the social and political forms of mediation that can protect it.



## Formal-Political and Societal Democracy

### A Commentary on Alain Touraine's "Democracy versus History"

**J. Samuel Valenzuela**

Alain Touraine's scholarly production is dotted with provocative ideas that have led to extensive debates. This paper is no exception. It raises in the last analysis an issue over which there is as yet little clarity in the expanding frontier of thinking about democratization, namely, to what length should citizenship rights, participation, and equality be extended throughout the social and not only the political system before we can say that we are in the presence of a really democratic nation-state. The topic is important as it speaks to the quality and depth of democratization; after all, we vote every so many years, but we live week after week in families, workplaces, and schools, and we sometimes participate, willingly or not, in various associations related to our jobs, communities, parental responsibilities, religious beliefs, political positions, advocacy of various causes, and so on.

It would be impossible in a short commentary to reflect on all the significant themes raised in Touraine's paper. Consequently, my focus here will be on an important problem that has been tangentially treated in his contribution. It has to do with the relationship between formal democracy and citizenship rights at the national political level, on the one hand, and democratization throughout societal institutions on the other. Tocqueville assumed that both aspects went together; the societal pressures for social equality and participation that he saw so startlingly evident in American society had a symbiotic combination with democracy at the political level.<sup>1</sup> Since then most democratic political theory has followed this assumption, although social scientists examining workplaces and organizations as well as feminist scholars have questioned its validity.<sup>2</sup>

### Types of Democracy

Not surprisingly for someone whose oeuvre has long covered the world of work and of social movements, the accent in Touraine's paper is on societal democratization. He presents three conceptions or modalities of democracy, and he examines the characteristics assumed by citizenship, authority and distribution or equality in all walks of the national social fabric according to them. The main focus is, hence, on viewing "democracy" through its societal

---

1 Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 2 vols.

2 For elaborations of these latter themes, see Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970); C. B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); and Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy* (University Park, PA.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971).

manifestations, or outcomes, rather than, more traditionally in Political Science, by looking at political rules and procedures. Thus, “revolutionary democracy” is such because it seeks to extend social and economic equality in favor of downtrodden sectors. “Liberal democracy” refers to conceptions that, while using the language of equality and of opportunity, lead to a society molded (or distorted) by the in many ways deleterious effects of markets free from state regulation as well as from the constraints imposed by the collective organization of those with deficient individual market capacity. And “social and cultural” democracy, Touraine’s preferred model, seeks to advance a more thorough and systematic democratic quality to society by extending freedom, equality, participation, and notions of citizenship rights in every aspect of societal life.

But which are the links between these conceptions of democracy in society and the political rules and procedures usually identified with democratic regimes? Touraine notes that the pursuit of “revolutionary democracy” has led in fact to authoritarian or totalitarian regimes – hence to non-democracies despite their element of societal “democraticness” as seen through greater equality (even if such equality has been deficient in practice where this conception was imposed). Similarly, the imposition of free markets on the socio-economic institutions of society that characterizes “liberal democracy” can be accomplished most thoroughly under the strong state action of oligarchic or dictatorial, and hence non-democratic, regimes. After all, a fully democratic regime cannot be so without permitting rights of association, and these therefore allow market participants, including those in the labor market, to form organizations that can ratchet markets up or down by enveloping them with institutional constraints or by pressing the state to regulate them. There is no automatic connection between *laissez faire* capitalism and democratic polities.<sup>3</sup> The pursuit of the greater “democraticness” of society implied by Touraine’s “social and cultural democracy” requires, more than the previous models, a political democracy. However, this is also problematic; one cannot discover an easy Tocquevilian symbiosis between the two aspects of democracy here either. I will return to this point below.

## The Centrality of Formal Political Democracy

A rather simple conclusion can be derived from the foregoing discussion. In any discussion of “democracy” it is certainly vital to keep the formal, purely political definition of democratic governance in the Dahlsian and Linzean senses, i. e., regular competitive and non-fraudulent

---

3 Such a connection has become, nonetheless, an item of dogma among advocates of free markets in Washington policy making circles, think tanks, and world financial institutions. As John Williamson, the codifier of the so-called “Washington consensus”, writes: “the combination of a democratic political system and a competitive market economy is pretty stable”; and “once a society has made substantial economic progress there is a *natural emergence* of pressures for democratization” (my emphasis). John Williamson, “In Search of a Manual for Technopols”, in John Williamson, ed., *The Political Economy of Policy Reform* (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1994), p. 24. Naturally, for Williamson such “substantial economic progress” is only possible with thoroughly free markets.

elections with universal suffrage to choose who will govern, freedoms of speech and of political organization, protection for basic human rights, and such, as the core minimum aspect of the notion of democracy.<sup>4</sup> Touraine certainly subscribes to this point, although in developing his models of democracy by focusing on their societal ramifications the reader sometimes loses sight of it in the paper. This means that if a nation-state has a political regime with the formal trappings to qualify, however minimally, as a democracy, we can still assert that it is a democracy no matter how unequal and undemocratic its society – and vice versa. Hence, the political rules and procedures are of the essence.

Similarly, if what Touraine's models of democracy have in common is that they have all been espoused, at one point or another, by socio-political movements and their related ideologists seeking significant changes, I would propose adding a fourth model of democracy to his scheme. It could be called "political democracy" to refer to the ideal of establishing in the strictest possible sense the mechanisms of a thoroughly democratic system of political governance. Such an ideal has been pursued by a wide variety of groups over the past two hundred years, such as the English radicals of the late eighteenth century, the French nineteenth century republican opponents of the monarchies and the Second Empire, labor movements in Northern Europe pressing for universal and equal suffrage, feminist movements demanding the vote for women, and, more recently, the many groups struggling to establish or reestablish democracy and the respect for human rights against authoritarian and post-totalitarian rulers in the South and East of our planet. All these movements had one thing in common: they pursued the establishment of procedural democracy as an end in itself, even though they of course thought, not without some justification, that such regime changes would be followed by what they saw as more just policy outcomes and more extensive equality among citizens. But let us leave these groups and their models aside, and return to the problem of the relationship between the rules and procedures of political regimes and the broader matter of the extent of societal "democraticness".

## **From Formal Democracy to Societal Democratization?**

It would be easy to assume that the deepening of the quality of democracy invariably and inexorably begins after a minimal procedural democracy has been established. But the connection between political democratization and a societal deepening of democracy is much

---

4 Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 3; Juan J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 5. In Linz's definition universal suffrage is "at least universal male suffrage", but a regime with more stringent requirements could also be considered democratic; p. 5. Linz also notes that those elected to govern must also have access to "all effective political offices"; p. 5. This can be a problem in cases of transition to democracy through the creation of "tutelary powers" and "reserved domains" of policy, as elaborated in J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings: Notion, Process, and Facilitating Conditions", in Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and J. Samuel Valenzuela, eds., *Issues of Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1992).

more complex than what is implied in this assumption, because the tempo and timing of both processes are different and because they can move independently of each other. Procedural democracy can be established rather quickly, while the maturation of forms of civil democracy, i. e., a greater sense of equality, of tolerance and respect for differences among citizens, of individual and group rights and freedoms at all levels, of participation in a wide array of institutions from the workplace to the school, and so on, require changes that take much longer. The tempo of these changes is different because societal democratization is governed as well by cultural, social and economic forces and inertia that do not respond simply and automatically to alterations in the regime's political procedures.

Moreover, societal democratization in some respects may undermine the efficient operation of a procedural democracy. Democratic governability may be enhanced, for example, by the ability of leaderships of interest groups and/or of parties to take decisions without having to subject their resolutions to a constant and extensive round of consultations with their members. While this may constitute a deficit of democratic participation, it does increase the efficiency of governance. And having the mechanisms for rank and file participation in deciding all important issues may not, in the end, be as democratic as it appears; instead, it could merely offer greater opportunities for militant minorities to express themselves in ways that are fully out of proportion with the weight of their numbers within the membership. A fully participative democracy consumes a lot of time and energy, more in fact than most people are willing to commit. All effective democracies contain significant areas where authority is either delegated to leading figures or assumed by them in the normal course of exercising their invested authority.

I will not try to develop here, even in a sketchy and partial form, the factors affecting the extent of different aspects of societal democratization and their degree of synchronization with political democracy. There is no space, and I do not have the necessary answers to the complex questions raised by these issues. But allow me to venture some observations regarding the effects of what could be called "command cultures".

### **Patterns of Authority in Society and Political Democracy**

National societies may be said to have (for historical reasons that go deep into centuries sometimes) certain styles of expressing authority, certain culturally ingrained command patterns. These have to do with the ways superiors relate to subordinates, and the manner in which peers relate to each other as well as the extent to which they relate to authority individually or collectively. Simplifying a bit, and following an analysis I first heard from Larissa Lomnitz's research in progress on Mexican and Chilean styles of authority, such command cultures can have generally vertical lines, or may depend more on forming horizontal

consensus to be effective.<sup>5</sup> There may be, as well, several authority cultures co-existing in complex national societies, such that what is seen as a legitimate form of authority in one context is not in others. American society is probably the most pluralistic in this regard. If this is correct, it follows that the degree to which individuals accept the legitimacy of authority as expressed in the societal institutions with which they have contact depends on the extent to which it is expressed in ways that are compatible with the broader authority culture in which they are immersed (assuming the individuals in question are not deviants with respect to this aspect of their culture).

Going a step further, it is easy to postulate, quite axiomatically, that procedural democracy at the national political level is most compatible with an advanced “democraticness” of culturally ingrained societal authority patterns. This notion returns to the Tocquevilian symbiosis between the two aspects, and is essentially the point that Harry Eckstein has advanced regarding the congruity of societal and political authority in his reflections on the stability of democracy based on the Norwegian case.<sup>6</sup> It is also easy to assert the opposite conclusion, i.e., that authoritarian regimes are basically incompatible with very democratic authority cultures. If such regimes emerge in societies with very “democratic” authority cultures they will be viewed as even less legitimate and even more unstable than is usually the case, and they will have smoother transitions to democracy when the opportunity for democratization arises. Finally, it also follows from these premises that establishing a political democracy in a national society with a very authoritarian or vertical command culture will create an unstable and threatened democracy which is prone to authoritarian reversion as the traditional forces gain the upper hand. It should also provide some perhaps crucial support for more democratic societal groups to begin to challenge and change that culture.

While these propositions are widely assumed to be true, I wonder whether they are all that correct. For example, if a vertical authority culture is well entrenched and viewed largely as quite legitimate, it may have little difficulty in pervading the way political authority is organized under a democratic regime. It can show up in the lack of democracy within parties, in the relationship between state bureaucracies and social interests, in relations between executives and legislatures, and so on. This encroachment of the overall cultural authority patterns would not make such regimes fall outside our minimal procedural definitions of democracy, and such cases may create very stable democracies precisely because they lead to a different kind of symbiosis or congruity between political and societal authority patterns than Tocqueville or Eckstein had in mind. This would also mean that the establishment of formal democracy would not necessarily lead to convergence among national societies, but rather to different kinds of

---

5 Larissa Lomnitz presented this notion in a seminar given at the Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame, in May of 1994.

6 Harry Eckstein, “A Theory of Stable Democracy”, Appendix B of his *Division and Cohesion in Democracy: A Study of Norway* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966). It should be noted that Eckstein sees certain limits to this congruity, as all societal institutions cannot be fully democratic.

democratic experiences. What is valid for Norwegians may simply never occur in Japan. If this other kind of symbiosis or congruity is possible, then the seemingly axiomatic notion that introducing procedural democracy will generate pressures for change toward a more “democratic” civil society needs to be questioned.

Moreover, most national societies, even if they are not as plural as the United States, do not have a single all-pervasive national authority culture. As a result, paradoxically, the presence of a democratic political regime may well offer those segments of the national society with the most vertical authority culture the necessary freedoms and guarantees to continue to defend it, exercise it, and even to try to impose it on the rest of society by setting standards through legislation or other means. While those with a more democratic culture will reject attempts to impose such standards, would it not be a violation of democratic rights if they were to try, in turn, to impose their standards on the broadest possible scale? Hence, national societies with significant cultural diversity may be more deeply democratic in so far as they retain a minimal, rather than an expansive, conception of societal-institutional citizenship. The depth of democracy would correspond in these cases more to a notion of respect for plurality of social forms rather than a uniform enhancement of participation, equality and leadership accountability to the “citizens” in all areas.

Naturally, minimal standards of citizenship would nonetheless have to be defined and met at all levels for such democracies to exist. To take an extreme but illustrative example, no employer should be permitted in a democracy to hide behind individual rights of any kind to justify retaining bonded labor. And an important component of a minimal degree of individual freedom should also be the right to move from one institutional envelope to another. Those dissatisfied with their culture of origin should be able to exit from it. This notion is quite compatible with Touraine’s model of “social and cultural democracy”, in which the essential unity that permits its diversity is given by the right to individual mobility between institutional envelopes, a right guaranteed, to repeat, by the existence of a democratic political regime.

Turning now to authoritarian regimes,<sup>7</sup> these may coexist – contrary to the above noted axiomatic notions – for a surprisingly long period of time in societies that otherwise have quite “democratic” subnational patterns of authority. In fact, this apparent incompatibility may aid rather than hinder the longevity of the authoritarian regime. I have always been struck by the widely accepted idea that the Spanish transition to democracy was facilitated by the development, beginning in 1959, of a quite “normal” West European society underneath the mantle of the Franco dictatorship.<sup>8</sup> In fact, this argument can be turned on its head. Such a

---

7 For an extensive definitional discussion of these regimes and their differences with totalitarian ones see Juan J. Linz, “Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes”, in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), vol. 3.

8 For a recent restatement of this argument see Guillermo de la Dehesa, “Spain”, in John Williamson, ed., pp. 124–5. It has been developed, notably, by Víctor Pérez Díaz, *The Emergence of Democratic Spain and the “Invention”*

“modern” society with mechanisms and opportunities for individual expression and interest intermediation may have facilitated the continuation of a regime to which not even its very staff gave full credence. Political tensions under the cover of authoritarian regimes may in fact cumulate less to a crisis point if economic and social institutions function well, permitting venues for the resolution of demands, the expression of interests, the affirmation of cherished symbols, social mobility, access to education, and the availability of options regarding important aspects of daily life such as where to live, work, go to school, travel, and what to read.<sup>9</sup> And changes in societal authority cultures may occur in ways that advance “democraticness” in society under authoritarian regimes, in part as a reaction to such authoritarianism at the national level.

In sum, Alain Touraine’s paper touches on this very significant theme in which the explicit or implicit certitudes in the literature need to be questioned. I hope this commentary points to comparative historical research that will do so.

---

*of a Democratic Tradition* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales, Fundación Juan March, *Estudios/Working Papers*, no. 1, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> This argument does not apply to the political consequences of liberalizing an authoritarian regime in response to a political crisis. Invariably such openings lead to greater pressures for change, and in that sense they are destabilizing for such regimes.